



In the Beginning of AAAA Fifty Years Ago

Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from a forthcoming article by retired BG James M. Hesson, a past AAAA president, on the founding of AAAA's Scholarship Program and the Foundation that supports it. Watch for this article in the 50th Anniversary Special Edition of ARMY AVIATION magazine in the spring of 2007.

In 1963, only six years after the founding of AAAA, a pioneer group met to establish the AAAA Scholarship Foundation, Inc. (AAAASF).

In addition to members and their unmarried children, eligibility also includes spouses, unmarried siblings, and unmarried grandchildren of current and deceased AAAA members.

The first scholarship awarded was the result of a donation by the Ryan Aeronautical Company of San Diego, Calif.

In the early years fund-raising was limited to direct mail solicitation letters from the Foundation President and from the sale of 5,000 copies of the sheet music from the Cahn-Van Duesen original song "Army Aviation" donated by the Douglas Aircraft Co.

From 1963 until 1985, our awards (monetary grants) never exceeded 20 in number and a total value of \$10,000 per year.

During a foundation meeting in 1986 in Westport, Conn., a proposal was made to establish a goal of \$1,000,000 in financial assets in ten years.

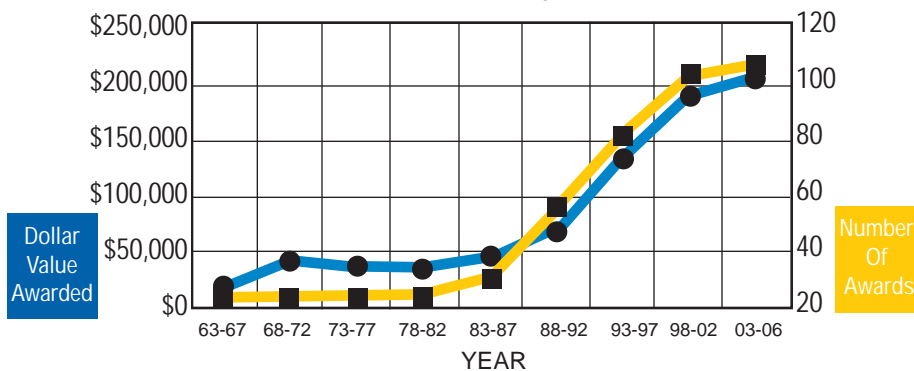
That goal was reached four years early at the beginning of 1992.

Today the program is supported by a current investment portfolio of approximately \$2.5 million and we awarded 148 scholarship grants and loans worth \$239,000 this year.

During the life of the program AAAA has awarded \$3,103,625 in grants and loans.

This growth could not have occurred without the outstanding support of the AAAA industry members, with a number of them contributing \$50,000.

Growth of the AAAA Scholarship Program
(Year Average)



In 1969 the "Cub Club"—an organization of "senior" Army Liaison Pilots—was the first recorded organization affiliated with AAAA that donated money to the scholarship fund to underwrite a scholarship.

Later in 1983, the Lindbergh Chapter of St. Louis underwrote a \$500 Scholarship.

These programs match individual chapter donations up to \$5,000 from the AAAASF general fund (based on fund availability) and are generally awarded the year the funds are provided.

In 2000, the Heritage Organization Matching Fund program was established.

The Foundation recognized that there were a number of organizations whose heritage was related to AAAA, but who did not have the infrastructure to manage a scholarship program.

The first organization was the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association who provided funds for an award in 2001.

They were subsequently followed by other organizations as: the Dust-Off Association (after CW4 Michael J. Novosel, Sr.), 114th Avn. Co. (Potomac Knights), 7-17th Cav. (Ruthless Riders), and the Otter-Caribou Association.

Since its inception, the AAAA Scholarship Foundation award program has been based on excellence.

A selection board meets annually in July to select grant and loan recipients.

Each application is "sanitized," with all references to names, rank of applicant or sponsor, and location removed from all documentation, before the files are scored by multiple evaluators.

The composite scores are tallied and a rank order by applicant category is established. The highest ranking applicants are awarded the most valuable grants.

Interest-free loans are also available. Currently 10 loans are issued annually.

In 44 years of growth from a \$1500 donation to \$2.5 million in assets, the foundation has focused on our AAAA members and support of our Soldiers and their families.

The foundation is fiscally sound with aggressive marketing efforts ongoing to raise additional funds. The selection process is fair and equitable in determining the most qualified students for awards.

After the more than \$3 million dollars in awards, AAAA members recognize the scholarship program as a valuable membership benefit.

The future is bright as we continue to support the AAAA membership.



BG James M. Hesson is a past AAAA President and was assisted by Art Kesten with research in preparing this article.